

# Strategy on How to Reduce Indiscipline in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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## a) Introduction

*This Innovative Programme is based on proper formation and efficient management of school based peer counseling clubs as the best way of reducing indiscipline and also restoring peace among pupils in secondary schools. In most schools the controversial issue of discipline and conflict management to enhance peace among the pupils has been left in the hands of teachers with pupils having no say on most of the issues affecting them at school. However, due to the soaring population and understaffing in most public secondary schools country wide, teachers have either inadequate or no time to deal with growing indiscipline among pupils. Moreover, very few teachers are trained in peer counseling and therefore possess limited skills to cope up with programmes that can restore discipline in secondary schools. More often than not, prefects are used to identify defiant pupils who are later handed to the teachers for appropriate punishment. Most teachers often take the prefects' word when solving indiscipline cases among pupils and may subsequently ignore other*

*testimonies from non prefects. This stereo type belief that prefects always tell the truth may increase conflicts among pupils rather than solve them. Other pupils may be depressed when they believe that it's only the prefects who are trusted and believed by the teachers. Prefects are also sometimes given powers to even administer punishment to other smaller children thus increasing acrimony among the learners.*

*This innovative programme therefore identified a more participatory and efficient way of discipline management in schools by piloting a way which would involve the children themselves in reducing the growing indiscipline in the school. Through the formation of peer counseling clubs many children would be involved in informing others on the best way to behave while in schools. Members of the school peer counseling clubs would be used as peace ambassadors who would not only enlighten others on the benefit of a peaceful co-existence but also be moulded into responsible models for others to admire.*

### **b) Problem Statement**

Growing indiscipline among secondary school pupils has continued to have a negative impact on efficient education management and administration in Kenya. In Mugai secondary school, the school had the problem of growing indiscipline among the pupils which compromised peace among the learners. I observed frequent fighting and noisy quarrels among the pupils, rampant destruction of school property and poor relationships among the pupils despite punitive intervention measures from the teachers to check the vice. Furthermore, the school prefects were the most hated in the school because they were seen as either spies of the school administration or as representatives of the unjust and corrupt society.

The school administration on its part used non corporal punishment as the best way of restoring discipline among the pupils. The culprits were made to weed the school sugarcane farm the whole afternoon or uproot tree stumps in the school compound or slash tall grass in the playground. Weeding the school Napier grass was also another alternative to punish wrong doers. However, despite

all those aforementioned interventions, indiscipline in the school continued to soar. There were more fighting among the pupils and the big pupils did not respect the teachers and the school subordinate staff. The drop out rate in standard six, seven and eight was very high. Some girls got pregnant and stopped coming to school while some boys opted for casual jobs this was may be due to lack of peace in the school.

The school administration involved both parents and guardians of the affected pupils but the results were negative. In most cases most parents and guardians sided with their children, accusing the administration of segregating the children on the basis of social class, gender or ethnic background. This led to a very poor relationship between the school administration and the community. During parents' meetings, parents would turn such meetings into a finger pointing and shouting match. At times prefects could be waylaid on their way home by bullies and beaten; such issues would be left in the hands of the Provincial administration.

They were two teachers trained in peer counseling in our school but they were

almost giving up on their effort to guide and council the growing number of deviant pupils. The purpose of this programme was therefore to use peer counseling club as the best way of restoring discipline among the pupils.

**c) Addressing the problem**

In January 2009 I sought the permission from the school administration to start a peer counseling club which I was granted. With the help of two teachers trained in peer counseling, we held a two day school based inset in which we sensitized teachers on how the club was to function and the support we needed from them. Some teachers were very co-operative although some argued that the club could not work in such a harsh environment. Yet others waited to see how we could start so that they could join us.

The second step I took was to seek advice from other non- teachers who had a vast experience in working with the youth. I got invaluable advice from workers of non governmental organizations like Amkeni, APHIA II Western and members of Straight talk of which I was a coordinator. They gave me

a lot of information and resource materials on how to educate the youths on emerging issues. I also held a one week awareness programme among the pupils from standard four to eight. The main objective of this programme was to inform the pupils on the role of peer counseling clubs in helping them cope with the every day's challenges. The programme also gave them the opportunity to know their role in helping the fellow pupils and members of the peer counseling club in trying to reduce indiscipline. The forum also gave us an opportunity to find the root causes of indiscipline, depression and frustration among the pupils.

Later I formed the peer counseling clubs involving pupils from standard four to standard eight. The steering committee of the club consisted of elected class representatives of the four classes who were a boy and a girl representing each class. Other members were on voluntary basis but had to be disciplined to be maintained in the club. All club members were to be of very high integrity and to be role models to others. Any club member found breaching the club's code

of conduct was to be suspended from the club until he/she reformed.

The club's meetings took place every Friday after classes. During such meetings, the club's weekly activities would be evaluated. The meetings also enabled the peer counselors and other available resource people to educate the club members on how to carry out their roles effectively. The club members would also update us on more challenging and emerging issues which required attention from the teachers or peer counselors.

The club members on their part organized to interact with their fellow pupils every Wednesday after classes. With the assistance of teachers, peer counselors and other volunteers, the club members would use this opportunity to create awareness among the fellow pupils on the need to behave well while in school. Situations which were beyond the scope of the club members were referred to the teachers. The teachers also helped in grouping the pupils into manageable groups according to either gender or age; depending on the topic of discussion. Sometimes resource people were also

invited to help the peer club members in clarifying the most challenging issues.

The club would also be involved in spreading peace messages in the school through music, drama, poetry, writing articles and drawing cartoons on the school notice board. During various school functions like Education Days, Parents' Days and School Assembly, club members would get an opportunity to pass the message to the peers. The club members also made a suggestion box where responses from other pupils on their opinions concerning the school were dropped. Such suggestions were thoroughly discussed during club meetings and the necessary actions taken. The council of prefects also met club members once every month where they were advised on how to make fair and just decisions.

The major obstacle at the initial stages of the programme was lack of support from the parents. Most of them objected the idea of their children being tutored by others. They termed this as an attempt by the lazy teachers to delegate their work to minors who were not mature enough to lead. The school management on its part, managed to call a parents' meeting where

we enlightened them on the club's call. Some parents were satisfied and started supporting the programme while others were still suspicious on the aims of the club. Another big obstacle was instilling confidence in club members. Most pupils were shy and had no exposure of standing and speaking before others; furthermore, some naughty pupils were always ready to humiliate their fellow peer tutors. However, we gave a lot of motivation and confidence to peer counseling club members and prepared them on how to endure the challenges from their friends. Furthermore, the teachers and other counselors were always ready to stand in for issues that would not be handled by the young ones. There also pessimism from some teachers who forecasted doom for the project. They argued that the peer counseling clubs could not have the necessary machinery to cure indiscipline. However, those determined always moved forward with program implementation. Lack of funds to purchase the necessary materials and stationery was also a big obstacle. The club had to rely on the school administration and volunteers for such

materials. Moreover the club's trips were limited to a few neighboring schools which were a walking distance away. With the availability of funds, the club intends to widen its scope to cover as many schools as possible in their campaign.

#### **d) Outcomes**

Six months after initiating this programme, I have realized a lot of changes in the school. The club membership has risen from sixteen to over sixty members. The discipline of the school pupils has started to improve. This can be inferred from the few cases of indiscipline being handled by the teachers of late. The administration has also reported very few cases of culprits being send home on indiscipline grounds and very few pupils are punished for disobeying school rules.

Most parents and guardians have also started changing their attitudes towards the school after realizing what the club has achieved. Most of them report to the teachers that their children have improved their behaviour even at home. During parents' meetings, many stakeholders still encourage the teachers

to maintain the club for the benefit of the whole community.

The school notice board has become active with pupils' letters, cartoons and articles on the benefit of the responsible youths. This is unlike before where the notice board only had announcements from the school administration. School functions are always lively with pupils' performances in drama, poetry and music. This has increased the confidence and creativity among the learners. In fact, the school performed well I Choir up to the provincial level in the year 2009.

The attitude of pupils towards prefects has improved tremendously. Most prefects make just and fair decisions, they do not victimize their enemies on mistakes they did not do. Most teachers have now agreed to treat all children fairly, irregardless of the social background, gender or ethnic background. This has restored the confidence of pupils in prefects and teachers.

Teachers have also a very easy time controlling the pupils. They have also reported an improvement in the academic performance among the pupils this has boosted their morale and their

perceptions on the behavior and ability of the children.

#### **e) Findings**

The best way of initiating positive changes in the behaviour and perceptions of children is to actively involve them in youths' awareness campaigns through clubs. The peers spend most of their time together during various activities and it is easier and cheaper to involve them in self-corrections and correcting others than involving the adults. Playmates, for instance, can get corrections from friends and change for the better than when the corrections come from others. When peers correct others, they gain a lot of responsibility and acceptance in the society. They also practice leadership roles when they are still young. This can go along way in reducing indiscipline and strikes witnessed in most public secondary and private secondary schools country wide.

The teachers can use peer counseling clubs as the most efficient way of reducing indiscipline in schools. Use of drama, music and sports in helping children correct their behaviour has a lot of success.

I also encouraged the peer counseling campaign to go beyond the school boundaries and capture the neighbouring schools and the community at large. This was by arranging visits for club members to visit other schools for the awareness campaign. During days such as National AIDS Day and Public Holidays the club members would perform music or plays which stressed on peaceful co-existence among members of the community. This was well received in the community and encouraged. With the availability of funds, the club plans to extend its visits to cover a larger population.

#### **f) Sustainability**

The future plans for the club are to widen the scope of the content of the club's campaign to include HIV awareness and gender equality campaign among the learners. This will enable the club address the most challenging and contemporary issues facing the youths.

In trying to intensify community participation in the programme, we have scheduled visits in the neighbouring school community. The visits will serve to sensitize parents and guardians on how to help the club achieve its goals. They

will be advised on how to support disciplining their children and ensure that they are in good company. Parents will also be updated on their children's behaviour and how they can help their children to change in the positive. The club is also planning to hold a fundraising targeting parents and other well-wishers. The funds will cover advertising costs for the club's programmes and visits to other schools to exchange views on emerging challenges. The formation of peer counseling clubs can be used by schools, colleges or other institutions of higher learning to reduce riots and strikes witnessed in many institutions countrywide. Other stakeholders can also replicate this programme by expanding it to campaign on issues like gender mainstreaming, HIV AIDS awareness and reduction in levels of corruption. This is because peer counseling clubs is the best platform for creating responsible and peace-loving citizens and hence foster the achievement of Vision 2030